The Retrograde

Monday, March 23, 2026

UTD's official, independently-run student newspaper.

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WHAT'S INSIDE?

Green fund's first projects 2

Congress pays a visit to campus 3

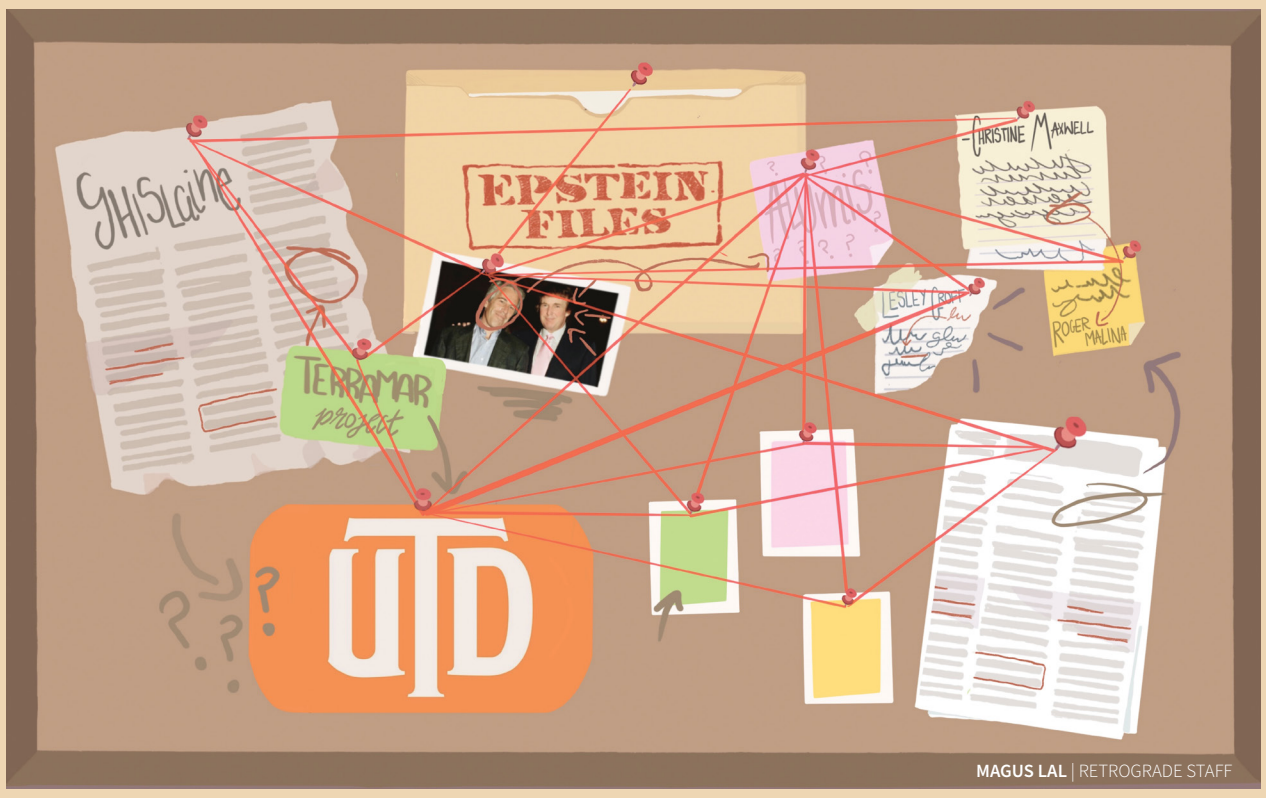
New eats in town 5

In photos: campus culture 6

The UTD-Epstein connection

An investigation into the Epstein files reveals UTD's web of unsettling links to the disgraced financier's circle

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief



MAGUS LAL | RETROGRADE STAFF

Multiple UTD employees and alumni have been connected to Jeffrey Epstein, his associates or his activities in the "Epstein files" — unsealed Department of Justice documents released to the public last month.

The most prominent connection, scattered across 158,735 partially redacted files, is Lesley Groff, a 1990 liberal arts UTD alum who served as Epstein's personal assistant for over a decade and was later identified in court documents as a co-conspirator in his operations.

Groff's resume, contained in the files, describes her role managing "all day-to-day affairs" for a "Manhattan Billionaire Fund Manager/Socialite," including "heavy calendaring," coordinating complex domestic and international travel and supervising staff across Epstein's households in Manhattan, Palm Beach, Sante Fe, Paris and a "private island in the Caribbean." Her resume boasts of "heavy interaction with high level associates, financiers, government officials" and other high profile individuals.

Beyond Groff, UTD has also been connected to a $2,500 university check sent to Ghislaine Maxwell years after her connection to Epstein's crimes was already known, and a funding proposal sent by another alum for one of Epstein's organizations to finance the creation of robots resembling human women.

From Richardson to Little St James

Groff graduated from UTD in 1990, a time when UTD's enrollment was just 8,685 students, with a B.A. in liberal arts. By February 2001, she had become Jeffrey Epstein's personal executive assistant — a position that placed her at the center of operations that prosecutors would later describe as a vast sex trafficking enterprise which involved minors.

The files mention Groff extensively, reflecting her role in scheduling, organizing and managing the daily operations of Epstein's homes and travel. Court documents and witness testimony have alleged that Groff is a co-conspirator who facilitated Epstein's abuse of underage girls, though she has never been formally charged. Her resume, submitted during her employment with Epstein, lists her responsibilities as including "gatekeeper" duties, "screening routing and handling all telephone calls, emails, and texts" and maintaining "confidential office and personal files."

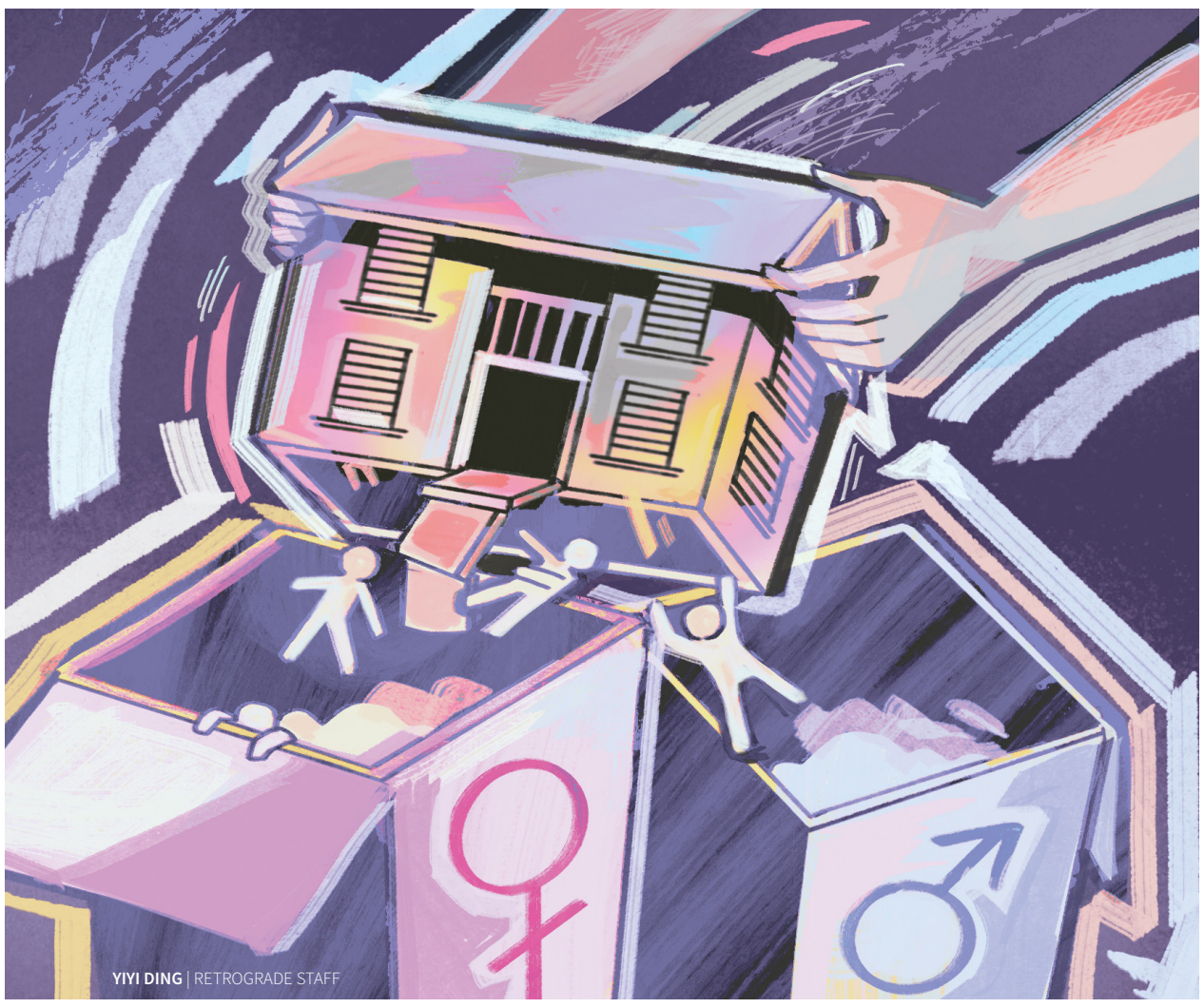
Before working for Epstein, Groff owned Village Office Supply in Bridgewater, New Jersey, which she grew "from its infancy to over $24 million." Her time at Village Office Supply began immediately after graduating UTD in May 1990 and ended when she began working for Epstein.

For current students, the association is deeply unsettling.

"I think that as students, we should be a little upset that this is who we are inevitably going to be associated with," political science and philosophy senior LeeAnn Patterson said. "I don't want to be put in the same camp as somebody mentioned 158,000 times in the Epstein files. As a student, I'm upset."

Groff's trajectory from Richardson to Epstein's orbit raises questions about the university's relation-

SEE EPSTEIN, PAGE 3



YIYI DING | RETROGRADE STAFF

UTD axes gender-inclusive housing for incoming students

The silent rollback of mixed-gender options, kicked off last year, is caused by logistical 'constraints' and worries queer students

MARIA SHAIKH
Managing Editor

Editor's note: A source in this article requested partial anonymity because they feared for their safety as a transgender individual in Texas.

As of this academic year, UTD no longer offers mixed-gender housing to incoming students. The change has been rolled out quietly, with the choice to opt in removed from housing application forms and brief emails sent to students concerned about the removal.

Mixed-gender housing — also known as gender-inclusive housing — started in 2017 in an effort to make LGBTQ+ students feel safer and more supported on campus. According to Matt Winser, former director of the Galerstein Gender Center, it was the first housing policy of its kind in the University of Texas system. While students in traditional housing are given only male or only female roommates to create single-gender dorms and apartment units, students who opt into inclusive housing are assigned roommates irrespective of gender. This creates mixed-gender dorms and units, which appeared in Housing's system as a "neutral" or third gender.

As of publication, University Housing has not sent out any official mass communication about gender-inclusive housing being rolled back. Animation and games freshman Maxwell Reed was unaware of the change until applying for a University Village apartment for next school year.

"Me and my friends had made this plan to all live together, but we are transgender in different ways," Reed said. "My friend made a roommate group, and I went to try and join it, and it said that the gender requirements could not be fulfilled. And this was so surprising to me because mixed-gender housing has been offered for the upperclassmen before."

In a Feb. 17 email to Reed, a representative of UTD housing said the 2025-2026 school year was the last time first-year students could opt into inclusive housing, and the current school year was the last time non-first years could opt into inclusive housing. According to the email, the

SEE HOUSING, PAGE 2

Collin's March 2026 primary, explained

The typically overshadowed off-year election may provide particular insight to the county's direction

TYLER CRIVELLA
Assistant Managing Editor

Collin County, encompassing the north half of UTD's campus and much of the surrounding suburbs where students and faculty reside, broke turnout records during last month's primary election, with Democrats showing up at unprecedented rates. The election stands in stark contrast to the deeply red descriptions media outlets have used to portray the county for years.

Over four million Texans voted in total, with approximately 2.3 million votes cast in the Democratic primary and 2.2 million in the Republican primary. This was the first time in the past five years where Democrats outnumbered Republicans at the ballot box.

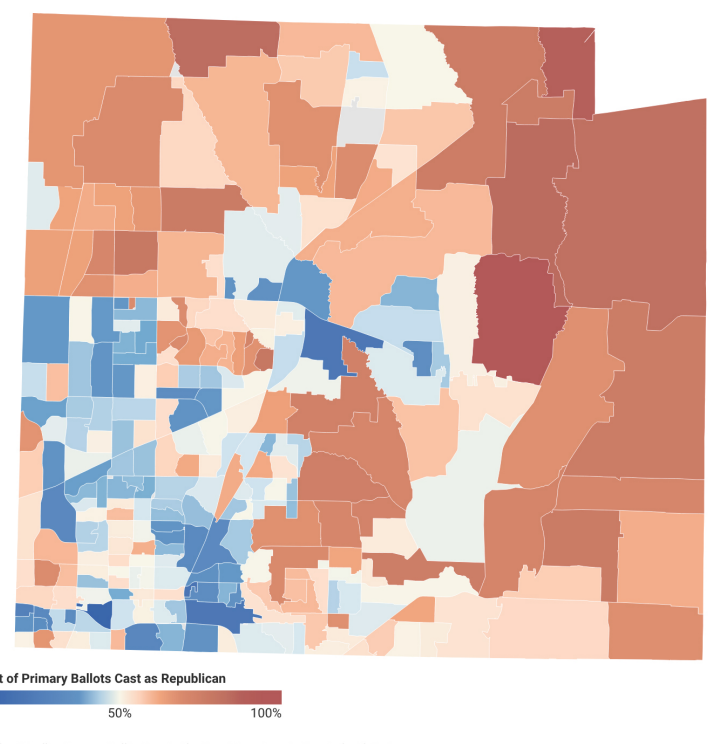
With official results published on the Collin County Elections Department's archive as of March 12, statistical trends have emerged. The following seven conclusions are a result of analyzing both unofficial running tallies and official results.

1. Turnout was typical for Republicans but extraordinary for Democrats.

In the past five March primary elections, Republicans have slowly increased their voter turnout in the county, with large jumps in 2022 and 2024. Democrats, meanwhile,

SEE PRIMARY, PAGE 3

Ballots in March 2026 Collin County Primary Election by Precinct and Party



Map: Tyler Crivella • Source: Collin County Elections Department • Created with Datawrapper

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Provost announces Academic Senate's second replacement

Five months after the dissolution of the Academic Senate, UTD makes a second attempt at faculty governance in the wake of SB 37

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

RETROGRADE STAFF

UTD's Academic Senate was dissolved Sept. 1, 2025, ending decades of shared governance. Its successor, the Interim Faculty Advisory Council, did not convene in its roughly five months of existence. Now, UTD is trying again.

In a Feb. 5 email to faculty, Provost Inga Musselman announced the creation of the Faculty Presidential Advisory Council, a new body that will "advise President Moghe on matters related to the welfare and mission of the University." The announcement comes more than five months after Senate Bill 37 took effect, abolishing faculty senates across the UT System and centralizing power with presidents, governing boards and state lawmakers.

The FPAC will consist of approximately 15 full-time faculty members, with each school contributing one non-tenure system representative. Schools with more than 50 tenured or tenure-track faculty will contribute at least one such member. Faculty holding administrative positions of department head or above are ineligible to be on the committee, meant to "allow UTD FPAC members to speak candidly and independently."

The council's members won't be elected. They'll be appointed by the president after a nomination process by school deans and the provost. Terms are two years, renewable, with the council meeting at least once per quarter.

Attempt two

The FPAC is the second attempt at faculty representation since the Academic Senate's dissolution. The first, the Interim Faculty Advisory Committee, was created Oct. 1, 2025, with 24 members, half of them former senators. Its charge was to perform "functions necessary for the operation of the university," including reviewing educational policies and advising the president.

It never met. Scheduled meetings were repeatedly canceled.

"For months I received no communication until I suddenly received the communication saying IFAC is dissolved without ever having met," Ravi Prakash, a former Academic Senate speaker and IFAC member, told *The Retrograde*.

IFAC was dissolved Jan. 23, less than two weeks before the FPAC announcement. The FPAC, unlike its predecessor, does not have any elected positions.

This bureaucratic shuffle stems from a fundamental rewrite of the rules governing faculty input. The old Regents' Rule 40101 granted faculty a "major role in the governance" of their academic institutions. The new rule, adopted Nov. 20, 2025 through SB 37, eliminates "governance" entirely. Faculty bodies are now strictly "advisory" with "no final decision-making authority." The university president has the sole discretion to establish them, appoint their members and dissolve them.

> "For months I received no communication until I suddenly received the communication saying IFAC is dissolved"
>
> **— Ravi Prakash**

What SB37 actually does

Senate Bill 37, authored by then-senator Brandon Creighton, did more than abolish faculty senates. It allows university governing boards to overturn "any decision made by the administration" and requires boards to individually approve or deny "each recommendation made by a faculty council or senate … on a matter related to curriculum or academic standards."

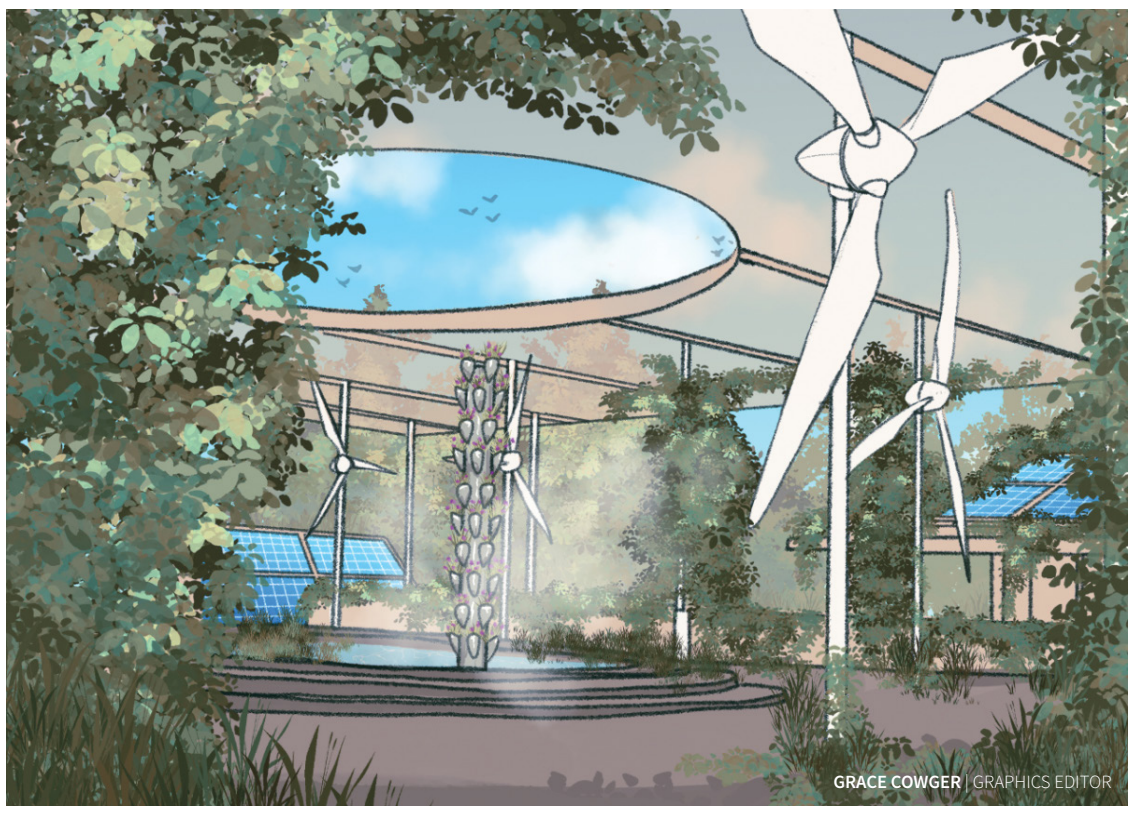
Any future faculty senate would be limited to two representatives per college — one appointed by the president, one elected by faculty. Members serve one-year terms and cannot be reappointed until four years after their most recent term. The president appoints the presiding officer.

"When I read the bill, it was clear the intent was to weaken faculty governance," Prakash said during the final Academic Senate meeting in August.

IFAC and FPAC are not considered new faculty senates, since they have not been approved by the UT System. They are advisory bodies, holding less power and influence over the school.

The committees in limbo

Beyond FPAC, the Feb. 5 email addressed the fate of the university's 45 standing committees. Previously, their mem-


GRACE COWGER | GRAPHICS EDITOR

Green fund seeks first round of projects

Nearly $100,000 available for student-led sustainability projects in fund's first year

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

The UTD Green Fund is now accepting project proposals for the first time since its approval in spring 2024.

The fund, which collects a $5 semesterly fee from students on variable tuition plans and all students enrolled after academic year 2024-2025, will support projects related to recycling, transportation, energy efficiency, renewable energy and campus beautification. In its first year of collecting fees, the fund has a little under $100,000 available to give out. With current UTD enrollment, the fund could grow as large as $300,000 per year by its fourth year. Submissions for project proposals are open until April 10.

Political science senior Alisa Model, who served as Student Government's Green Initiative chair when the push for the Green Fund first began, said she hopes the money is able to bring about the changes students want to see on campus.

"We have so many students who are passionate about sustainability and this fund gives them the opportunity to make those ideas a reality," Model said. "Other Green Funds, such as at UT Austin's and [University of North Texas'] funds, have been extremely successful and I hope the UTD fund will grow to be just as successful. As UTD faces budget cuts across the entire university, this fund makes sure that we can still invest in the sustainability of our university."

> "I think that this is the best opportunity we've had yet to make a difference here on campus and beautify it."
>
> **— Colton Rupe**

The fund is managed by a student-majority committee: three students appointed by SG, two appointed by the Graduate Student Assembly and two staff members. A simple majority is needed to fund a project.

Supply chain management sophomore Colton Rupe, who serves as the current Green Initiative chair, said the fund represents years of student-led work. The student body approved the fee in April 2024 and the UT System Board of Regents signed off shortly thereafter. Fall 2025 marked the first semester the fee was collected.

"I think that this is the best opportunity we've had yet to make a difference here on campus and beautify it," Rupe said. "I absolutely encourage students to send in all of [their] ideas."

Students, faculty and staff can apply online through the Student Affairs website. Applicants must have a sponsoring university department or academic unit. Funding is allocated directly through Student Affairs, which will oversee project purchases.

The Retrograde reached out to outgoing associate vice president of Student Affairs Chad Thomas, who previously oversaw SG and Student Affairs' collaboration on the fund. As of publication, Thomas did not provide comment.

"If you have an idea and you're not sure what to do with it, just reach out to me," Rupe said. "Any idea is worth it. No idea is dumb."

Retrograde wins top prize in Texas journalism conference

The publication won the Overall Excellence award among other accolades this year

TYLER CRIVELLA
Assistant Managing Editor

The Retrograde received 13 awards at the 2026 Texas Intercollegiate Press Association conference, held in Denton this past weekend. Its staff won the Overall Excellence award among Division I newspapers — TIPA's category for large four-year schools — marking the first time any UTD publication has won the prize.

Overall Excellence Division 1 is TIPA's highest honor for competing newspapers. Participants submit three complete editions of the newspaper and are evaluated based on thoroughness of coverage, variety, appearance and editorial ability. UTD teams previously won third in the category in 2022, but have not won the top honor since 2017, when the school was placed in a smaller division.

This year, *The Retrograde* exclusively competed in pre-published awards, in which advisers and journalists from across Texas judge an entire year's worth of work.

The full list of honors The Retrograde won can be found at retrogradenews.com.

FAREEHA CHOUDHURY | RETROGRADE STAFF

HOUSING
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

change is because of operational constraints because there are only enough mixed-gender beds for students already enrolled in the inclusive housing program.

Maddie, a professional communication and digital media studies freshman, said she came to UTD in large part because it offered gender-inclusive housing. When she toured campus last January, her tour guide mentioned inclusive housing as an option for incoming freshmen. But when she applied for first-year housing, University Housing said inclusive options were not available anymore.

"That was very surprising and had to require a lot of fixing on my end to adjust my plan," Maddie said. "It'd be nice if I got an email before I started the housing process saying it's no longer available, which would have been disheartening, but it would have been better than finding it out on my own by emailing probably the summer intern working there and just finding that out."

Read the rest of this story online at retrogradenews.com.

GREGORIO OLIVARES | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

EPPS debuts new Dean Council

Sixteen selected students will now advise faculty decisions

FATIMAH YOUSAF
Staff Writer

On Feb. 19, the School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences announced the creation of the first-ever EPPS Dean Council to give students a larger say in how the school runs.

Formed with the help of Student Government Student Affairs Chair Jasmine Kouhestani and Legislative Affairs Chair Jackson Logue, the council aims to provide a new perspective to the EPPS Dean — Jennifer Holmes — about its students' needs. Originally SG's EPPS liaisons, Logue and Kouhestani wanted to improve their school. They said having a dedicated council to assist the dean was something they felt was sorely lacking.

"A lot of the students felt like there were opportunities that other schools had that the school of EPPS doesn't have," Kouhestani said. "For example, EPPS doesn't really have that many research-centric traditional majors, so research opportunities are more catered to other schools."

According to Kouhestani, a criminology junior, the council is meant to provide leadership opportunities within EPPS while giving students a platform to pursue projects and drive changes. Student-led projects are important to both her and Logue; Logue, a political science junior, said there are projects that only students can lead because of their problem-solving skills and intimate understanding of campus.

"We felt like there was that gap that was missing within the school of EPPS," Logue said. "We really felt like the school needed a dean's council because JSOM had a dean's council and it's been historically very successful for them."

Since Holmes' appointment as dean in 2019, she has expressed a desire to see EPPS grow. Kouhestani and Logue said they'd heard Holmes recently say she wants students involved in that growth, so when they approached her with the council idea, it came to life.

To get students involved, the council plans to host a mentorship program for students in the EPPS "Red Zone," or students in need of academic support, in coordination with Associate Dean James Harrington. It also plans to release surveys to gauge students' satisfaction with EPPS courses and opportunities and potentially host an end-

> "A lot of the students felt like there were opportunities that other schools had that the school of EPPS doesn't have."
>
> **— Jasmine Kouhestani**

of-year award ceremony for EPPS students. Through direct outreach and advertisement, Kouhestani and Logue said the council also hopes to reach out to freshmen and commuters, who can engage with EPPS faculty and staff by being part of the council or attending its events.

Logue said his goal for the council is to give other students the same connection and opportunities he has received. Logue said EPPS has provided him opportunity to "truly flourish" as a "better student and leader" through studying abroad and research. He wants to give back to EPPS by working alongside other students through the council.

Kouhestani and Logue began work on the council from late October to early November last year, before officially establishing it in early January with all the new appointees. The council announced its launch on Instagram the following month.

Read the rest of this story online at retrogradenews.com.

Forty-eight hours of Congress on campus

Former reps Mike Capuano and Thaddeus McCotter discuss public service, compromise, democracy

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

Student Government brought two former U.S. Representatives to UTD from March 9 to 10 as part of the Congress to Campus civic engagement event.

Former Democratic representative Mike Capuano, who represented the seventh and eighth districts in Massachusetts during his 20-year tenure, and former Republican representative Thaddeus McCotter, who represented Michigan's 11th district during his nine years, met with roughly 400 students throughout their trip. This included two class visits, various meetings and a dinner with SG leaders and faculty.

The Congress to Campus initiative is a longstanding project run by the U.S. Association of Former Members of Congress. Its purpose, according to the association, is to provide "college students with a unique civic education by engaging them in honest dialogue with bipartisan teams of Former Members of Congress, congressional staff, and American diplomats." Political science junior Jackson Logue, who serves as the chair of Student Government's Legislative Affairs committee, said the event aimed to show students that politics doesn't have to be constantly toxic.

"At these types of events, the former members are much more open and much more willing to discuss and be honest than current members of Congress," Logue said. "They're able to be more forthcoming, more candid than I think most people ever get to see."

Read the rest of this story online at retrogradenews.com.

SUKRITI SINHA | RETROGRADE STAFF

EPSTEIN
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

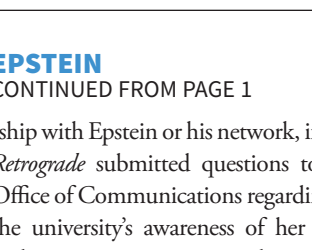
-ship with Epstein or his network, if any. *The Retrograde* submitted questions to UTD's Office of Communications regarding Groff, the university's awareness of her activities and any prior statements or donations from Groff to UTD. As of publication, UTD did not respond.

"The university is woefully underestimating how much people care about child sex trafficking rings," Texas attorney and UT Austin law alum Crystal Tran said. "With somebody as prominent as Lesley Groff — who the documents have shown extensively is aware and has actively participated in the child sex trafficking ring — my question for the university is, did you guys know about this? It would be super easy for a university to disavow child sex traffickers."

A check, a speech and silence

Groff's connection is not the only thread connecting UTD to Epstein's circle. Buried in the university's promotional archive is a November 2014 News Center article announcing a campus visit from Ghislaine Maxwell — Epstein's longtime associate and convicted sex trafficker.

"Learn About Efforts to Protect High Seas at Free, Public Seminar," the headline reads. The article described Ghislaine Maxwell as "a businesswoman and maritime explorer" who would "share her adventures on the high seas and how they led to the creation of the TerraMar Project," a nonprofit focused on ocean conservation.



The event, hosted by the School of Interdisciplinary Studies and the Teacher Development Center, featured a reception, presentation and Q&A session at the Clark Center auditorium. Tickets were free.

George Fair, former dean of the Interdisciplinary School, was quoted as saying: "As a university, we have a duty to educate our community about real-world issues. The goal of hosting this event is to engage as many people as possible in this opportunity to be better informed." The NSM and EPPS schools also supported the event at the time.

Two months after Maxwell's visit, Terry Pankratz, then vice president for budget and finance, cut TerraMar a $2,500 check.

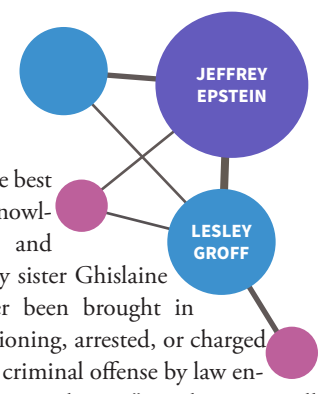
"The [vice president] himself approved this?" Tran said. "That's incredibly unusual given how university budget offices are typically run. This is even shadier. Now it becomes a question of why the highest-ranking finance person at the school is the one cutting the check when there are so many offices and officials below him that could, and in most cases would, have done it."

> "That's incredibly unusual given how university budget offices are typically run. This is even shadier."
>
> **— Crystal Tran, Texas attorney**

At the time of her UTD visit, Maxwell had already been publicly linked to Epstein following a 1996 report to the FBI regarding Epstein and Maxwell, and Epstein's 2008 guilty plea in Florida state court for procuring a child for prostitution and solicitation of a prostitute. The full extent of her involvement in his operations would not become public until six years after her appearance on campus. Ghislaine was arrested in 2020 on federal sex trafficking charges.

When Maxwell was being prosecuted, UTD's name popped up once again. Within the Epstein files is a letter written to U.S. District Judge Alison Nathan on Nov. 30, 2020 — one month after Maxwell's arrest — from Christine Malina-Maxwell, who identified herself as "one of Ghislaine Maxwell's three sisters" and a "doctoral candidate in Holocaust Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas."

The four-page letter, submitted in support of Maxwell's bail application, offers an impassioned defense of her sister's character. Malina-Maxwell describes Maxwell as "full of 'vim and vigor'" from childhood, details the family's history of tragedy — including the death of a sister from leukemia and a brother's fatal car accident — and portrays Maxwell as dedicated environmentalist whose TerraMar project helped influence the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 14 on ocean conservation.



"To the best of my knowledge and belief, my sister Ghislaine has never been brought in for questioning, arrested, or charged with any criminal offense by law enforcement until now," Malina-Maxwell wrote. "Ghislaine is not a malicious or jealous person. In all the 58 years I have known her, I have never seen her be violent or act inappropriately against anyone, let alone young adults or children as has been alleged."

Malina-Maxwell offered to put up her own home — valued at $1.5 million and described as her "only nest-egg for my retirement" — as part of Maxwell's bail application. "I know in every fibre of my being that my sister Ghislaine will never try to flee and will absolutely turn up to her trial, to have the opportunity to fight the charges against her," she wrote.

The letter also reveals Malina-Maxwell's professional credentials: she co-founded one of the first online search engines, "Magellan," which was featured on the homepage of Netscape in the 1990s and inducted into the Internet Protocol v6 Hall of Fame in 2019. She was the CEO of Techtonic Insight, Inc., an internet search startup.

Read the rest of this story online at retrogradenews.com.

PRIMARY
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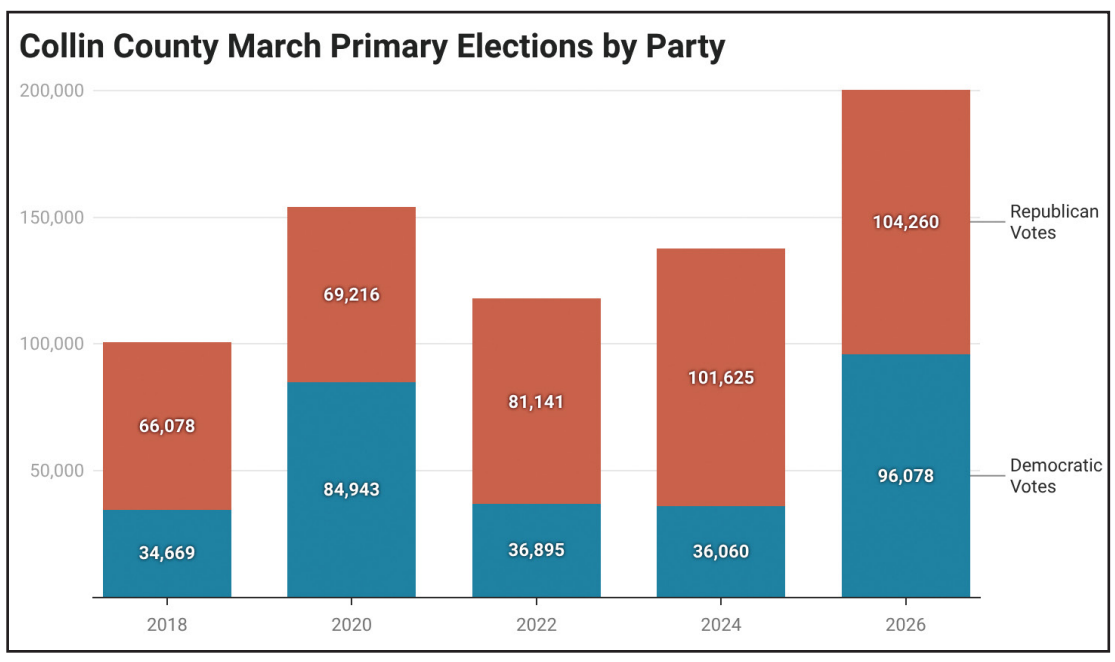
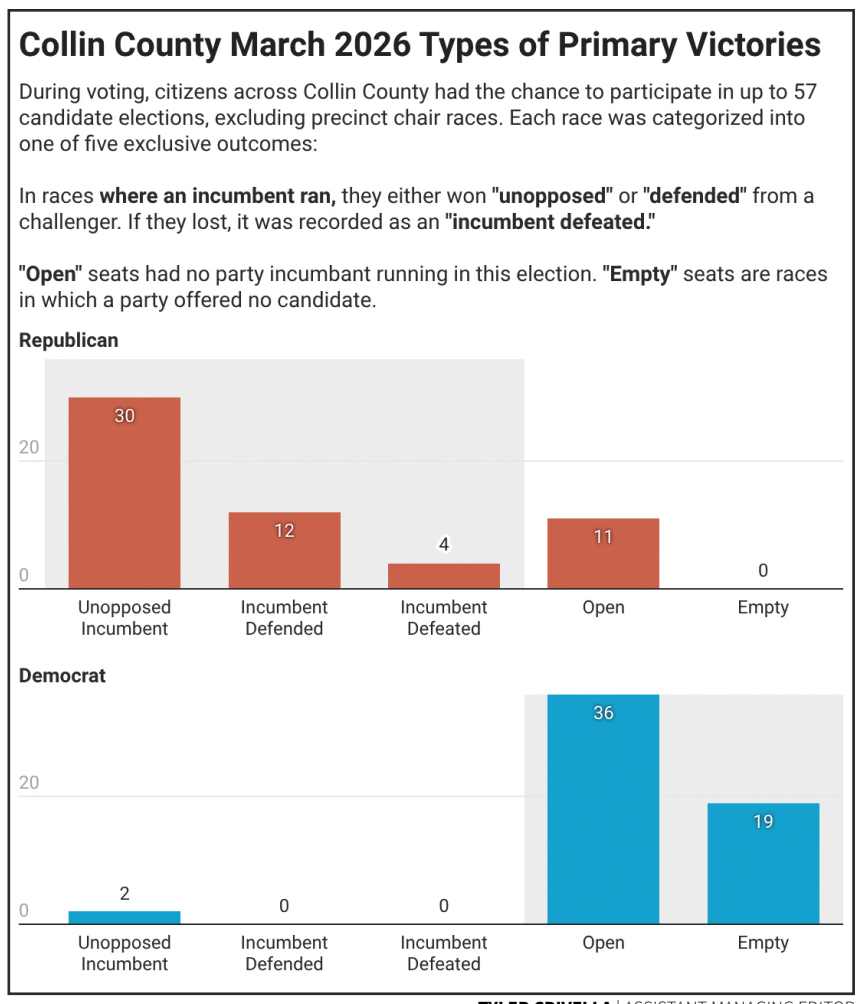




TYLER CRIVELLA | ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR

have either totaled about 35,000 votes or about 90,000 votes, with 2020 and 2026 serving as stand-out elections.

For Democrats, Jeremy Sutka, chair of the Collin County Democratic Party, sees the outcome as truly monumental. He says the surge was a result of not just the competitive top-of-ballot U.S. Senate race, but also year-round volunteer-led organizing and an empowered energy for change.

"In a county that has been a Republican stronghold for generations, this near 50-50 split is a monumental statement," Sutka said. "It confirms that Collin County is no longer a reliable bastion for the GOP; it is a true battleground."

2. Collin County's 'bottom left' – 'top right' divide remains strong.

As of 2025, Collin County is the fourth-fastest growing county in the nation. Its population growth, however, has been centered in the urban and suburban portions of the county, specifically in the Southwest corner. The increasingly diverse 'bottom left' voted disproportionately in the Democratic primary, continuing a growing trend.

"This 'bottom-left/top-right' split is likely a visual representation of a broader trend: the growing political divide between the more urban, diverse areas of the county and the more traditionally conservative, rural areas," Sutka said. "While we saw strong turnout in established Democratic areas, we also saw new Democratic voters and former Republican voters turning out for our primary across the county. The overall 48% share of the primary vote proves this is a county-wide phenomenon."

3. Incumbents triumphed over challengers.

In the Republican primary, incumbents were challenged largely from the grassroots, populist flank of the party. Meanwhile, Democrats, who typically lose county-level elections to Republicans, continue to struggle with filling all candidacy positions. In both parties, however, primary voters tended to overwhelmingly favor incumbent candidates.

4. Voters that came early came in numbers.

"This is absolutely unusual and historic," Sutka said. "To have over 132,000 voters cast ballots during the early voting period alone, the highest in 20 years, is a tectonic shift. We more than doubled the number of early voters compared to the 2024 primary."

5. Republicans unexpectedly disagreed with state propositions.

When asked for an interpretation of this data, the Collin County Republican Party and the Texas Young Republicans did not respond to requests for comment at the time of publication.

6. UTD voters loved James Talarico.

Following his Feb. 26 campus visit, Texas Rep. James Talarico received more votes than all other candidates on the ballot combined as the Democratic pick for the U.S. Senate seat. On the Republican side, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and incumbent U.S. Sen. John Conrnyn will head into a runoff scheduled for May 2, 2026.

"The enthusiasm seen at UTD and other pockets across the county is precisely what powered our record turnout, and it will be essential to our success in November," Sutka said.

7. UTD Republicans were hesitant on state proposals while Democrats leaned in left.

UTD's votership and role in Collin County have become crucial to local politics, with students serving not just as a voter base but also as a hub for events and employees. The data, according to Sutka, shows students' desire to address issues related to student debt, affordability, climate change and economic fairness.

"UTD's precinct is a microcosm of the future of our county," Sutka said. "It is younger, more diverse and more engaged on the issues that matter to a new generation. Voters should interpret this as a powerful signal that a university community is a hub of progressive energy and a key part of the coalition that will turn Collin County blue."

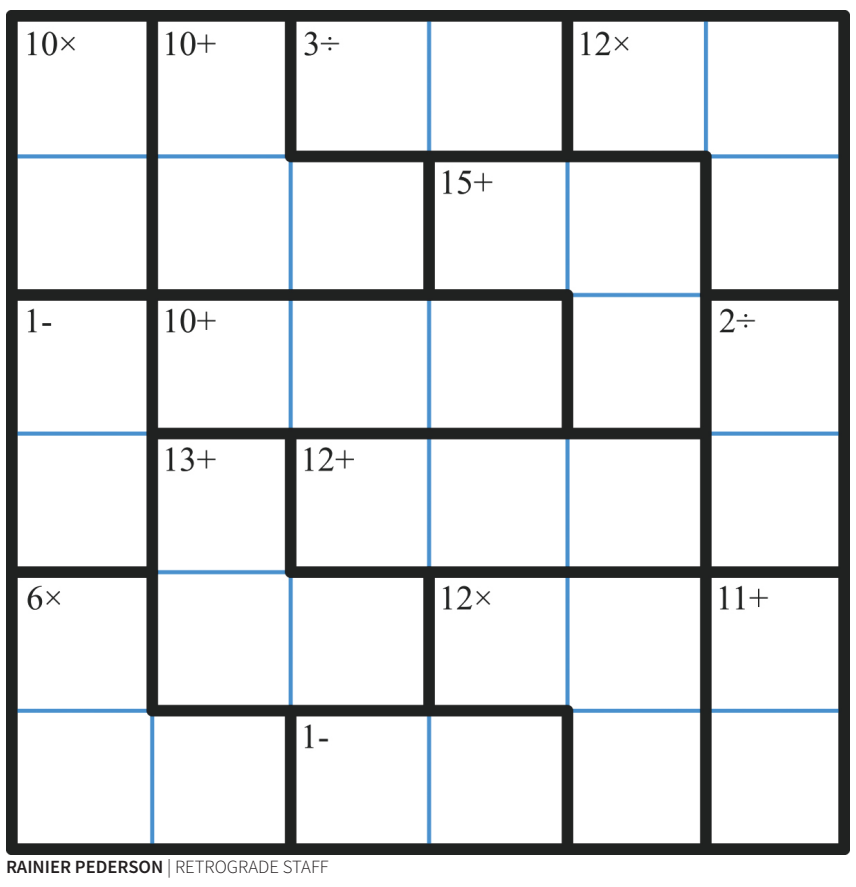
Numeric data alone can often cloud the truth. In the case of this election, however, the numbers tell a compelling story: a county looking for both drastic change and retrenched incumbency.

Read the rest of this story online at retrogradenews.com.

Puzzles

KenKen

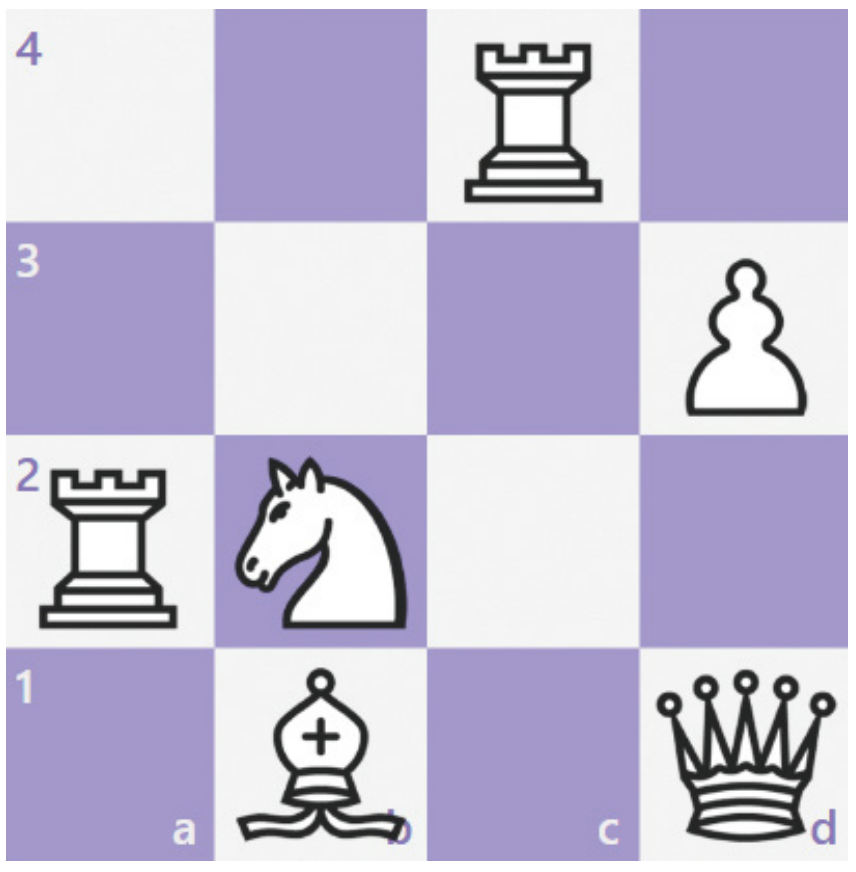
Instructions: Your goal is to fill up the 6×6 grid with numbers 1-6. Each column and row must have exactly one of each number. Each box (outlined with thick black lines) has a target number and a mathematical operation listed in the top-left corner. The numbers in each box must result in the target number when the corresponding mathematical operation is employed. For example, a box with 3+ could be satisfied with 1 and 2, as 1+2=3. Visit our website for a full walkthrough.



RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

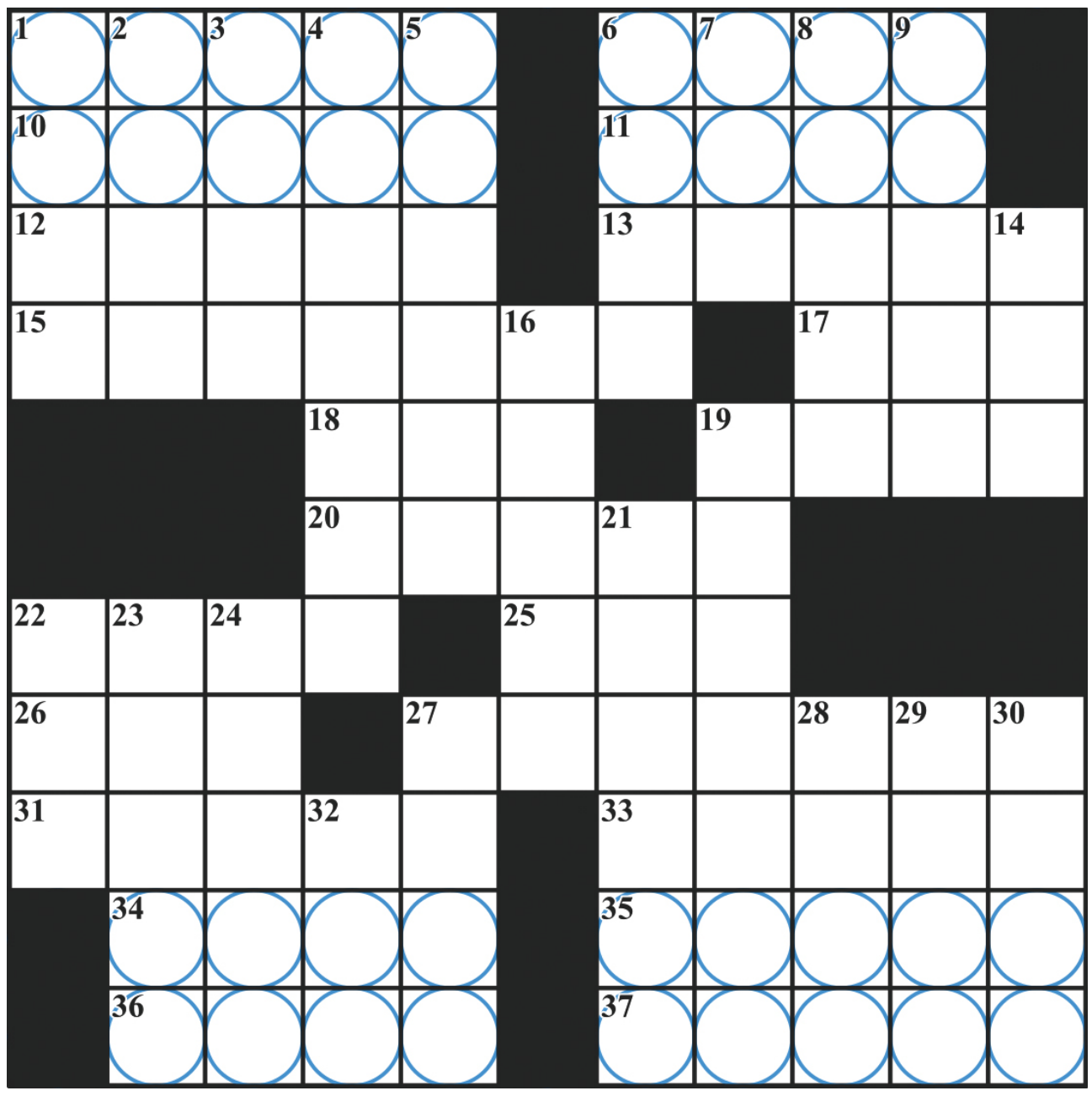
Solo Chess

Instructions: Perform capture-only moves until one piece remains. Pieces may be moved repeatedly.



TYLER CRIVELLA | RETROGRADE STAFF

Almost Twins



DIFFICULTY

★★★☆☆

RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

Need a hint?

Clues that end with "?" contain some form of wordplay or riddle. Clues that end with "Abbr." are an abbreviation or acronym. Grid spaces with a circle are theme words that tie into the puzzle's title, with the last theme word "revealing" the premise of the theme.

Across

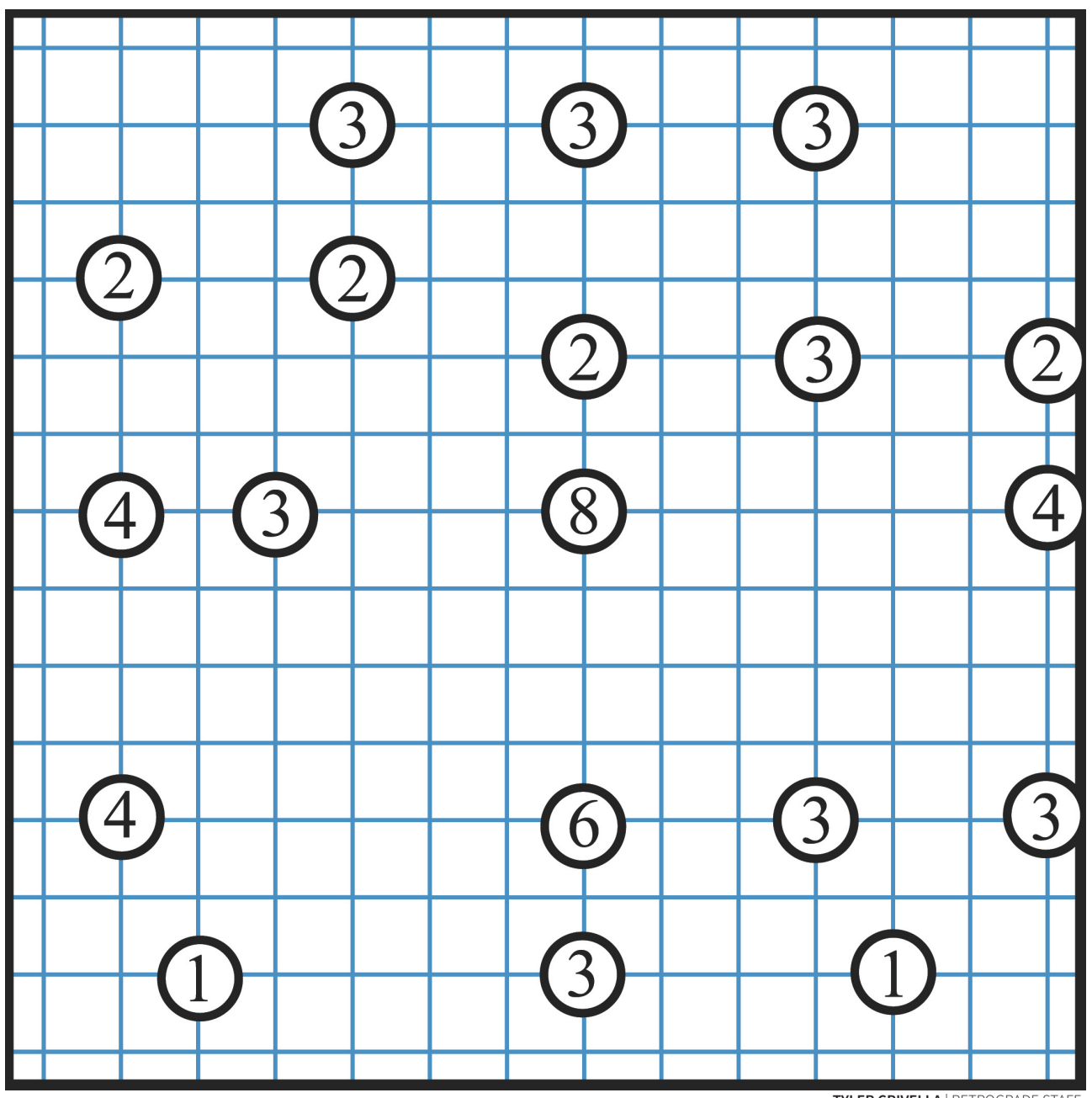
1 Place? (Homophone of 6A)
6 Don (Homophone of 1A)
10 Correct (Homophone of 11A)
11 Ceremony (Homophone of 10A)
12 In progress, according to Holmes
13 Judgement
15 Solidify an idea, perhaps
17 "___ nom est Temoc," in French
18 Unrefined mineral
19 Christian period of fasting
20 Of the past, for fashion
22 Pop
25 M.J. ___, professional women's golfer, also a McKinney resident
26 Advanced art degree, abbr.
27 Satirizing, often online with images
31 Latin dance style
33 Of the past, for songs
34 Precipitation (Homophone of 35A)
35 Rule (Homophone of 34A)
36 Source (Homophone of 37A)
37 Vision (Homophone of 36A)

Down

1 Enclose, like a burrito
2 Audiophile's ideal system, abbr.
3 _____ Spengler, of Ghostbusters fame
4 "Rival of the rose," per eponymous Emerson poem
5 _____ Ewen, wrestler known professionally as Big E
6 Small bird
7 End to the Muslim period of fasting
8 "Once upon _ ____"
9 Scouting mission, for short
14 Dynamite, abbr.
16 "__ ___ People"
19 Stony German siren
21 Whisperings
22 Text, abbr.
23 Joan __ ___, French saint
24 _____ Lama
27 Lion's hair
28 "_ ___ it, man!"
29 Near, medievally
30 Good man
32 Relax in a chair

Hashi

Instructions: Connect all islands to one network by drawing only horizontal or vertical lines. Lines may not cross. The total number of lines attached to a given island is the number presented in its circle. Each island may only have two lines attached to it in any given direction.

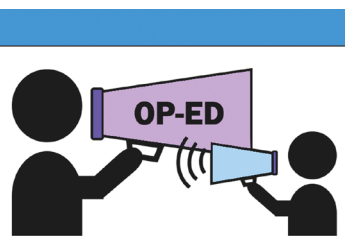


TYLER CRIVELLA | RETROGRADE STAFF

Comic

'Intricate Rituals'

RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF



The Retrograde publishes op-ed submissions in an effort to reflect a wide variety of campus perspectives. Topics or the opinion reflected in the op-ed should be relevant to a college or local audience. Apart from your name and photo, personal info will not be published. *The Retrograde* reserves the right to reject any submission and to edit op-eds for clarity, brevity, accuracy and to prevent libel. Email op-eds to theretrogradenews@gmail.com.

A spring fling with new Richardson eats

Survived midterms only to realize you're exhausted, famished and desperate for some change? Here's three great restaurants to try.

SAHASRA ELAPROLU
Staff Writer

As students finish their dreaded midterms, spring blooms and a week's worth of break from classes ends, three new Richardson restaurants await Comets' first visits. Josefina's Cocina, Ayat and Sushi On all offer unique dining experiences with compelling stories behind them, sure to bring delight to any post exam treat, birthday dinner or spring break side quest.

Located less than ten minutes west of UTD campus, Josefina's Cocina is an authentic Mexican restaurant which opened its doors in December 2025 and is quickly gaining popularity. Fernando Barrera, the owner, said the restaurant was inspired by the home-cooked meals his mother made.

"Josefina's is a tribute to my mom," Barrera said. "She passed away four years ago and she taught me how to cook, she taught me how to bake and how to deal with food and spices, so this concept is a tribute to everything that she did."

The ambiance of the restaurant perfectly blends a homey atmosphere with an upscale one. Pristine white tables fill the space, lively music plays in the background and expensive liquor is extravagantly displayed behind a large bar.

"We use a lot of granite and marble on the tables," Barrera said. "My mother loved flowers so I wanted to include as many flowers as I could without messing with the design."

The food itself was a unique experience when compared to other Mexican restaurants in the area. The salsas, which came with a batch of freshly fried tortilla chips, were deliciously creamy and light, different from a normally tomatoey and acidic dip. The vegetarian enchiladas, ordered by a friend who found the description of the dish enticing, were flavorful and tangy, which paired nicely with the mild rice and beans that were included as sides. The chicken tacos, which I order as my go-to safe choice at any Latin American restaurant, were tender. The pieces of pineapple that came with them were unexpected but paired nicely with the dish, giving it a fresh flavor. Most of the entrees came out to about $20 each.

Aside from the food, what makes Josefina's special is that every corner of the restaurant carries a piece of his mother's legacy.

"At the bar, we have a Josefina's margarita," Barrera said. "It has rosemary syrup because my mom used to have rosemary on her patio outside and inside the house, so that's why we tried to apply rosemary to a lot of our dishes."

All in all, from the food to the ambiance to the quality service, I'd rate Josefina's Cocina 4.7 out of 5 stars.

Coming from Brooklyn, New York to Richardson, Texas, Michelin Guide-featured Ayat is a renowned Palestinian restaurant which centers community, unity and resistance. Opening its doors less than a month ago, Ayat is already serving rich and flavorful food in a well decorated, busy space.

Ayat's Head of Communications, Hanifa Abbasi, said the rapidly growing chain saw a lot of potential in Richardson for a new branch when they were thinking of options outside the NYC area.

"Richardson stood out to us because of its strong sense of community, cultural diversity and growing appreciation for global cuisine," Abbasi said. "We want to introduce Palestinian cuisine and hospitality to new audiences in places where people are open, curious and value meaningful dining experiences. Richardson felt like a natural next step in sharing our story and continuing to bring people together around the table."

Our meal at Ayat started with zahir, a rich and creamy roasted cauliflower dish bursting with flavor. We then enjoyed warm and chewy pita with olive oil and zaatar which all paired amazingly. Our main course, fattah jaj, which we abashedly ordered because it was the cheapest entree, was the star of the show regardless.

Read the rest of this story online at retrogradenews.com.

FAREEHA CHOUDHURY | RETROGRADE STAFF

BLOOMING WHERE YOU'RE PLANTED

How comets staying in DFW spent break, and how to make staying local worth it.

I plan on staying in DFW and catching up on sleep during spring break … Look for local coffee shops or lesser-known restaurants, those are usually the hidden gems.

— Khadijah Khalid, literature junior

I plan on spending a lot of time with my siblings because I have really long days when I'm on campus. So I'll get to hang out with them, play Roblox a lot … There's [also] a lot of good boba places around here. There's TeaLatte [and] Feng Cha.

— Philip Chilaparapu, data science junior

I have a tennis tournament planned, so I'll be in Arlington for a day, but other than that, I'm just planning on spending time with friends in the local area … Oh yeah, go to Six Flags for a day!

— Akshara Akella, business analytics junior

I have some family I want to visit down in Georgia, but other than that I should be here a majority of the time … There's a couple of good food places in downtown Plano. There's a barbecue place that I like to go and eat at with my friends and there's also a pizza place called Urban Crust that I think is pretty good.

— Christopher Everett, VPAS junior

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INTERVIEWS BY SAMHITHA PALLA AND MUAAZ ABED | RETROGRADE STAFF
PHOTOS BY MUAAZ ABED | RETROGRADE STAFF

KAT VAN NICE | RETROGRADE STAFF

Continent-wide cultural collisions celebrate CNY

Lunar New Year, brought to a packed ATEC auditorium

HENRY DAVIS
Staff Writer

On the eve of Feb. 13, students, families, celebrants, as well as those who generally appreciate the opportunity for a holiday trickled in to fill BAHT's 1,200 seat auditorium in anticipation of the night's spectacle. Nineteen groups were set to perform works from across Asia, including the "Arabian" dance, "Coffee," from "The Nutcracker"; a dance of young girls riding horses to represent the incoming Year of the Horse; and a fashion show flaunting Vietnamese Áo dài, Indian saris and Chinese Tang shirts. Everything came together in a grand celebration of Lunar New Year.

As the ceiling lights dimmed and projecting beams pierced the air, four main hosts took the stage: Frank Wang, Kati MC, Sabrina Yang and the most notable among the four, Slater Rhea. Making his career as the so-called "Musical Diplomat" between China and the U.S., he provided a steady stream of jokes through the welcoming ceremony and during breaks between acts.

All of it would've surely been amusing for myself and my plus one, the photographer for this article, except that a majority of it was in Mandarin. The crowd didn't seem to mind, though, as they laughed along with Rhea and the other hosts. For those that didn't understand the language like me, we simply laughed because of the infectious energy of the crowd.

What came to a surprise to me, however, was just how many countries besides China celebrate Lunar New Year: from India to South Korea and Mongolia, all of these countries and more were represented within the night's program. A local dance company, DashAvatar Dance Academy, held a sattriya, a dance telling a 500-year-old Hindu story with a theme of spiritual transformation; Siew-Lee Chin, an opera singer, performed "The Night in Ulaanbaatar" with lyrics rooted in the ringing in of the new year in Mongolia's capital and largest city; and in the fashion show, women wearing traditional South Korean hanboks were seen.

The show's magic came from how different each segment was compared to its counterparts. Two dancers captivated the audience with their ability to quickly change their face masks in the art of Chinese bian lian, where they would hide their faces behind a fan, and within a second, their mask showing a happy face would change into a face resembling the devil. Each mask changed into something new: a blue mask with a crying face into white mask with a powdered woman's face into a purple one with a screaming man's face — it was insane in all the best ways. After this, the audience would be entranced by a lower-dosed version of a

SEE **COLLISION**, PAGE 6

ORGANIC WORLDS: MAN MEETS MACHINE

Biology and technology combine in "Organic Worlds: Symbiogenesis in Art," an immersive space with moving robots and insect song

NANDINI SINGH
Life & Arts Editor

This article is a part of an ongoing series covering the "Organic Worlds" exhibition at the SPIN Gallery. This article features Ken Rinaldo's work and the previous one features Amy Youngs'.

"Organic Worlds: Symbiogenesis in Art" brings the outdoors inside, replicating every intricacy of life from growing organisms to the biology ticking within them. As the gallery space flourishes with moving robots, hanging plants, diagrams and audio that delves into the background of each work, audiences are taken beyond the four walls and into an extension of our natural world.

The gallery is about biology, but goes beyond themes we'd expect like genes. Instead, it incorporates topics such as history, communication and to Ken Rinaldo — one of the exhibiting artists — technology. In a series of pieces about chemical languages in living systems, produced by photographing butterflies, lakes and rivers, Rinaldo finds himself using technology often for various outputs including light/dark values and texture mapping. Rinaldo said he welcomes the role of technology in biology, with a slight personal touch.

"A philosophy I have often with my works is find a way to use and more so misuse technology," Rinaldo said. "If we use technology as intended, we get the same thing everybody else has, so I look for the cracks in the technology and have an individual expression."

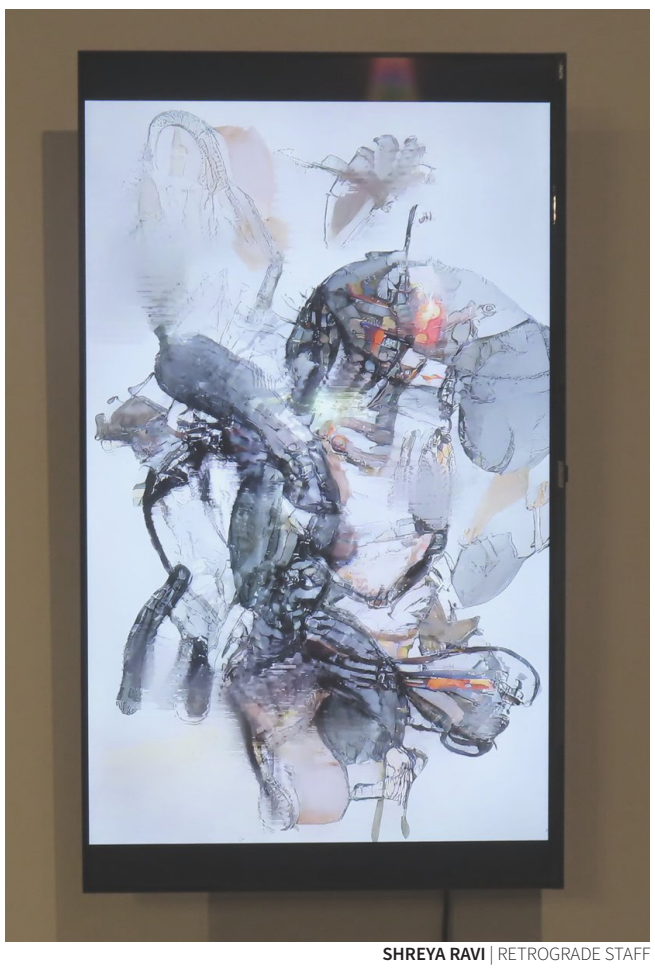
In a series of hand-drawn works by Rinaldo called "Synthetic Evolution," he finds a relationship between an unlikely pair: living systems and machines or artificial intelligence. The process includes him looking at his hand-drawn work and correlating a series of words to it, such as "hubcap" or "pipedream," and feeding those words into an AI system. The system generates millions of images, which he filters to find his ideal match. Rinaldo said that while living systems will always be more complex than human-made technologies, there's an array of emotions present in technological expression all the same.

"It is meant to explore this relationship between machine and biological systems," Rinaldo said. "Some of the emotions were excitement, revulsion, disgust, some of the other emotions were being absolutely thrilled that it would take something I had created and change it in such an abstract way."

Different cultures and parts of the world frequently inspire artists in their work. A piece titled "Anicca Antenna," the word "anicca" referring to the Buddhist concept of something in constant change, was the product of that inspiration for Rinaldo. The piece looks at the intelligence of soil as in part a living entity and on the whole connected to cultural growth.

"Every country inspires [my] work [and] every culture inspires in some way," Rinaldo said. "Sometimes, because I go and meet other brilliant artists as a lifelong learner, for me the brilliance is places like UTD, where we get to experience this tremendous international community of others that bring so much wisdom and knowledge to the collective space."

NIHITHA VANDANAPU | RETROGRADE STAFF



SHREYA RAVI | RETROGRADE STAFF

"Anicca Antenna" invites curiosity not only through its name, but also through the isopods that roam around the soil. The isopods' movement is connected to robots that respond through movement, a feat of engineering that took six years. The person behind the code, TradeMark Gunderson, shared a story of his own: one where he found a way to incorporate his bachelor's in computer science with art.

"I was always interested in the arts, that I always knew there would be some side of me that would be doing some creative thing whether it necessarily involved technology or not," Gunderson said. "Once I found art and technology and ways to combine it, it was a natural thing."

Read the rest of this story online at retrogradenews.com.

PHOTOS BY NIHITHA VANDANAPU | RETROGRADE STAFF

COLLISION

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 5

light show or rave, performed by tens of 40–50-year-olds waving around flashlights. Then immediately after, a champion in Chinese singing, Scott Huang, would sing a song in a very demure setting, completely opposite to the two groups before him. There were zero dull moments in this festival with its cultural exposition and exposure.

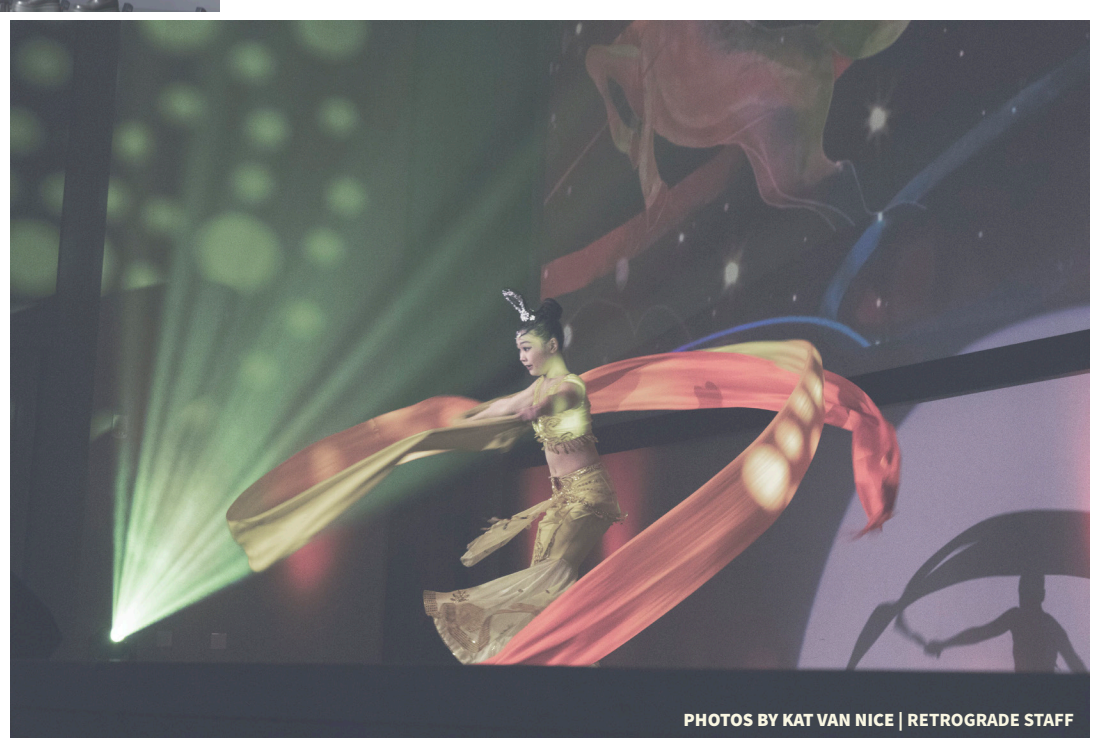
While all 19 groups entertained, some acts stuck with the audience long after the show had ended. Sixth in presenting order was a young-adult female group called Dance Code performing "We Go Up" by BABYMONSTER, where they mirrored all of the aspects of a K-pop girl-group that I've grown to love: high-fashion street-style clothing, dancing with sharp arm movements and, of course, a banger beat in the background. While it was not particularly related to Lunar New Year, it was definitely worth the watch.

No. 17 in the lineup was a saxophone quartet performing "Passionate Continent," with one lead saxist playing notes that I would only hear in swing music. The notes were energetic and evoked some in the audience to start clapping to the rhythm. Finally, at No. 19, Rhea himself took the stage to sing "The Sky Calls & Father's Prairie." I understood as to why he was so famous in China — he was a Louisianian singing in perfect Chinese. I was shocked as to what I was seeing; when he spoke English the few times on stage, he sounded like a normal American and even had a Southern accent, but when he sang, it was like his voice adopted an accent that confused my brain into thinking he was lip-syncing, which he clearly wasn't.

Since it was now the Year of the Horse per the Chinese zodiac, horse elements were present throughout the showcase. Beyond the dance troupe of young girls, YES Orchestra presented "Horse Racing," where they translated the sounds of running horses into stringed instruments. Over 20 performers plucked strings and created vibrato songs panting a scene where dashing horses had entered the audience.

The festival showcased a lot of the stereotypical aspects of Lunar New Year that I, a non-Asian person, know such as red lanterns, the pipa instrument, and discussing what the animal of the year represents. But overwhelmingly, it showed me what I had never experienced: Chinese folk music, face changing, new instruments like the harp-like guzheng, the mixing of ballet with martial arts, the non-East Asian cultures that celebrate the holiday and more.

This was definitely something not to miss, and its impacts extend beyond the auditorium's walls. The West's incomprehensible opposition towards the East and its cultures is dying and with that, our access as Americans to the cultures shared by billions of people is becoming exponentially more accessible. I've always wanted to know what I was missing out on and after this festival, I've scraped the surface of the magic that is currently happening on the other side of the world.



PHOTOS BY KAT VAN NICE | RETROGRADE STAFF

The dynamic harmonies of Shakespeare

What's in a name? The choir-and-piano performance "Much Ado About Singing," by any other name, would sound as sweet.

SUKRITI SINHA
Staff Writer

Poetry through song filled the sanctuary of Grace Presbyterian Church on the evening of March 7, as an audience gathered to witness two choir groups perform a choral program inspired by Shakespeare's timeless works. Rather than simply presenting Shakespeare's text in a musical setting, "Much Ado About Singing" combined a classical and contemporary repertoire into a single voice. What resulted was an evening that proved to be a testament to the adaptability of Shakespeare's works, and how they continue to inspire a diverse art style.

The University Choir, UTD Chamber Singers and UTD lecturer and professional pianist Artem Arutyunan performed under the direction of Jonathan Palant, associate dean of the arts and director of choral activities at UTD. Beyond his work on campus, Palant is the founder and conductor of the Credo Community Choir, a mixed adult choir with about 170 active members, and the Dallas Street Choir, a choral group comprised of people who are homeless or otherwise disadvantaged. Both choirs have received attention and recognition in their mission to use music as a means to foster community and personal expression in the DFW metroplex.

The program focused on different arrangements of pieces that featured Shakespeare's poetry. This included songs that already appeared in his more well-known works, and poems from his shorter works. The evening started off with "It Was a Lover and His Lass," a song from Act V, scene III of Shakespeare's pastoral comedy "As You Like It." This madrigal was performed by the University Choir with buoyancy, uncovering themes of joy and the fleeting nature of springtime. The light articulation and the short phrases created a conversational and youthful effect, which mirrored the lyrics that told a tale of young love and celebration. The lively and expressive interpretations of Thomas Morley's arrangement immediately drew the audience into the playful exchange between the different voices and created a warm atmosphere within the sanctuary.

Next unfolded a range of flirtatious, dynamic and energetic selections. "Sigh No More Ladies" from "Much Ado About Nothing" and "O Mistress Mine" from "Twelfth Night" approached romance from different emotional angles. The former took on a playful but cautionary tone, with Shakespeare's poetry advising women to live an independent and carefree life, and that the nature of men has always been deceitful and untrustworthy. The latter, however, took a more yearning path to a theme of fleeting youth, similar to "It Was a Lover and His Lass," but with an elongated and lilting style. Hearing these two different interpretations of love brought an air of reflection the sanctuary and the audience: "Sigh No More Ladies" and its message of empowerment, and "Oh Mistress Mine" and its lingering reluctance provided for a stillness at the end of the performances that invited contemplation on the unfolding of the text and the music.

These performances featured soloists from the University Choir and an exclusive performance of "Over Hill, Over Dale" from "A Midsummer Night's Dream" from a derivation of the University Choir, the Soprano-Alto choir. A special segment came from Professor Nili Riemer Bueckert's performance of an aria from Benjamin Britten's "A Midsummer Night's Dream" opera composition. She took on the role of Queen Titania, ruler of the fairies, who has enchanted her love and is advising her servants to tread lightly around him as she waits for him to wake. This piece featured Bueckert's dynamic range; the sanctuary filled with crystal-clear high notes at the crux of her performance and resounding mid-range notes through the entire piece, giving her performance a theatrical presence. Bueckert truly commanded this performance in many ways. The clarity of her vocal range filled the room so completely and comfortably that it almost seemed like the audience was holding their breath between her phrases. In those moments, it felt like the character, Queen Titania, was tangible in all of her caution and her intensity. The sanctuary of the church transformed into the dreamlike castle of the fairies in those moments, as the aria's performance left a visible impression on the space and its audience.

On the piano for this evening was Arutyunan, an accomplished solo, chamber and collaborative performer from Moscow.

Read the rest of this story online at retrogradenews,con.

PHOTO BY SUKRITI SINHA | RETROGRADE STAFF
GRAPHIC BY GRACE COWGER | GRAPHICS EDITOR

In Doodles: How did you spend your spring break?

ALEXA LEE | RETROGRADE STAFF

GRACE COWGER | GRAPHICS EDITOR

ERIN GUTSCHKE | RETROGRADE STAFF

3RD SPACE DIGITAL | COURTESY

Commuter hell no more: 3rd Space Digital vs. UTD stereotypes

An up-and-coming club makes room for something new between attending class and heading home

MAR OLOGBAN
Staff Writer

UTD's campus culture critically lacks third spaces. The meaning of a "third space" is a place separate from work and home, where people can socialize freely and at no cost. But pervasive commuter culture and suburban design leave many Comets wanting. Enter 3rd Space Digital.

3rd Space Digital is a club created in response to a perceived lack of community among creatives at UTD. Emeka Ohumaegbulem, a biomedical engineering junior and club president, noticed there wasn't a specific place other alternative art groups could gather to interchange ideas and explore their identity.

"We've noticed that especially here at UTD and the Dallas space as a whole, there's not really a strong emphasis on creative cohesion," Ohumaegbulem said. "We just wanted a space where we could grow, hone our skills, and meet new people, and continue to just enjoy life."

The Rate My Professors rating for the school's social life is a measly 2.9 out of 5. UTD, from an outsider's perspective, is seen as an antisocial school, and on campus, it may be hard for some people to break into friend groups, Ohumaegbulem said.

"There's not really many places for people to go and meet new people or like enjoy themselves," Ohumaegbulem said.

While the club advertises creative gatherings, it is open to everyone. Its main long-term offering is for students looking to flex their creative muscles by working on a magazine to showcase a culmination of their work. But its previous and upcoming events, which have taken place all across campus, have been general enough for anyone to hop in and join. It also offers mock court sessions, inspired by the "Ace Attorney" video game series, featuring whimsical, funny debates argued seriously.

"It was just some of these stupidest debates, like 'is water wet' type conversations," Ohumaegbulem said. "It's easily polarizing, but it's not controversial in the sense that it's affecting anyone's well-being."

The club's branding is eye-catching, attracting people who might otherwise walk by a poster without a second glance. Jeyem Paule, a mechanical engineering junior, was the brain behind the infamous idea of taking an outfit selfie with a cat poster for a video. The poster brought in so many pictures that they had to set a limit, but the simple poster generated a lot of interest in the club and future events, Paule said.

"Everybody can take a picture in front of a flyer," Paule said. "I think this type of marketing would definitely get not just creative people out there, but anybody."

Given that the club's events attract a general audience, the club's officers have clarified that it is meant to be both a magazine and a "third space." The magazine is meant to focus on the creatives in the club, or anyone who wants to try their hand at anything new, according to Paule.

"The editorial aspect of it was bringing the idea of greater people out there," Paule said. "We thought photo shoots would be very popular, considering Dallas as a whole has this hidden niche of people who have a certain sense of fashion."

3rd Space Digital plans to release both a physical and digital magazine by the end of the spring 2026 semester.

"I'm hoping that the spirit of third space, even if our club doesn't end up making it in the next five years, is held by the students that are still here," Ohumaegbulem said. "We can let people know that we're not just a commuter campus."

The vulnerable art of showing up

Student Government's Blank Space competition celebrates Comets who create

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ
Editor-in-Chief

GREGORIO OLIVARES GUTIERREZ | EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

If you wandered through the first floor of the Student Union from March 10 through 12, you might have noticed something unusual: students standing perfectly still in front of canvas paintings and statues, heads tilted, eyes squinting, confused and intrigued — before casting a quick vote and leaving. You might have seen a small group of people around a 3D sculpture of a woman kneeling on a stone pond. And if you stopped by the award ceremony on March 12, you would have seen a mountain of cookies.

This was Blank Space, Student Government's annual art competition, and for three days, aspiring art pieces competed to be named the winner and given a place on one of the SU's many blank white walls.

The competition, hosted by SG's Student Affairs Committee, was first held in 2019 but, because of the pandemic, stopped existing until it was brought back by alumna Margaret Belford in spring 2022. Blank Space has been held annually since then. Although thousands of students walk by the winners each day on the eponymous wall — in the center of the Student Union just between Chick-fil-A and Halal Shack — the contest itself seems to exist just outside student awareness, which is a shame, because the work on display each year is always worth a look.

This year sported traditional art, digital art and three-dimensional art — which sounds pretty straightforward until you realize it includes everything from last year's papier mache Temoc head to this year's origami sphere and a sculpture made of hot glue and rocks.

Vixx Welborn, a business administration sophomore and president of the Small Business Owner club, won first place in the 3D category for that last piece, which they said took over 15 hours to complete.

The piece depicts one of the characters from a story they're writing, a fantastical being who can inhabit statues. The silica figure emerges from a glittery hot glue pool surrounded by real rocks Welborn collected while in Oregon. The watery effect was not achieved with resin, which is the standard approach, but instead with hot glue, painstakingly melted with a heat gun until it rippled like water.

"The whole thing is that the whole pond is supposed to be living because it's almost a part of her," Welborn said. "The glitter is for fun."

What's striking about the piece is not just its craftsmanship, but how it takes up room in a space — although the handiwork and detail is still impressive, Welborn said with pride. It's the kind of thing you walk past and then circle back to, because something about it feels unfinished in the way that living things feel unfinished.

Read the rest of this story online at retrogradenews.com.

UTD handled the freeze well. We should celebrate that.

Preparedness and willingness to adapt are traits our administrators should continue embodying in future moments of crisis

TYLER CRIVELLA
Assistant Managing Editor

When forecasts in late January indicated UTD would be hit by a snowstorm, I was initially not too phased: I've survived far worse chills. Then I remembered I go to UTD. Suddenly, the fear of days-long blackouts and seemingly constant construction operations felt soul-crushing.

Thankfully, my fears were proven wrong. The last week of January's freeze, sometimes referred to as Winter Storm Fern, and the subsequent handling of building closures have been a pleasant surprise. It's rare that we stop to appreciate the beneficial work that administrators commit to on a day-to-day basis, but even as we acknowledge their missteps, it is just as important to affirm the times when they walk in the right direction.

As easy as it might be to think back on this week as just a couple days off class, the stakes were deadly. At least four teenage North Texans died. Our sense of safety is a privilege, and in this case, its preservation on campus should be recognized and rewarded.

Three aspects made UTD's snow week successful: transparency, contingency and caution. Each ought to become a mainstay in administration's playbook.

Transparency

UTD's first main announcement was sent at 9:54 a.m. on Friday, Jan. 22, announcing that in-person activities would be suspended after 5 p.m. that evening. Whatever your opinion is about the validity of closing campus, the messaging here was crucial: it prepared students for open communication by promising to make "a decision about Monday's classes and activities … no later than 3 p.m. Sunday."

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This open communication and deliberate transparency is the kind of comforting correspondence students and parents need to inform how they will react to an ongoing situation. Though it may seem minor, promises — like the ones made and kept during the freeze — provide stability during a potentially dangerous and changing set of circumstances.

The most important kind of transparency came in the months following Winter Storm Fern, as UTD explained the extent of its damage through email correspondences and a virtual town hall. On Feb. 16, UTD's open forum answered questions submitted by individuals in advance and during the call.

Many of the questions were emotionally charged, and I understand why. I know that for many researchers, the damage to their spaces is irreparable, physically and emotionally. But the openness on the part of administrators to admit fault and address the situation in a transparent manner is deeply respectful of their role. This is the sort of communication that must continue in the wake of increasing construction and the resulting disturbances.

Contingency

I do not know what internal meetings were held to deal with Winter Storm Fern, but nevertheless, it is abundantly clear that UTD administration held meetings and planned accordingly.

UTD's handling of meals during this process demonstrated an immense amount of planning. During the week when most buildings were closed, Dining Hall West's inclement weather operating schedule allowed students to get food within walking distance two days earlier than when general operations resumed. That didn't happen because a miracle struck the dining hall building and staff. It happened because of a well-operated contingency plan to keep students fed.

I know UTD's administrators have contingency plans for other generic circumstances — I've taken enough online institutional compliance courses to vouch for the plans on the books — but these plans are not static. They should be flexible enough to account for new and changing circumstances, and when we aren't in crisis mode, they must be updated with a forward-looking eye.

I am, however, unsure that these plans will be updated using the shared voices of all parties present on campus. With much of faculty governance killed following President Moghe's entrance to UTD, it is professors' insight on these crucial issues that will continue to be eroded. Contingency requires consensus.

Caution

During the week of canceled classes, I listened to multiple of my fellow students complain about being unable to return to in-person classes, even as the snow melted. Reasonably, students wanted to get the experience they paid for. Still, students' safety should come first in a crisis.

On Saturday, Jan. 24, UTD proactively canceled classes set to be held Monday, Jan. 26. This was an easy judgement to make. Students need not endanger their lives travelling to a campus, possibly without power, for a class that could be held online. Still, the fact that UTD recognized and communicated that ahead of time is important and likely prevented a tragedy.

Furthermore, the communication was short and deliberate: "Classes will not be held in person Monday." For tired and anxious students and staff, there's not much more that we could have asked for.

Hopefully, we have made it through winter, lest Punxsutawney Phil doubles down this year. Unfortunately, UTD will undoubtedly have more crises in the future. But when it does, it should look back to Winter Storm Fern as a model for how to address them.

The Texas Rangers will go as far as their offense can hit

Pitching will not be an issue for the team as they barrel into the upcoming season, but can their offense keep up?

KRISH GANDHI
Staff Writer

Two years after winning the World Series, the Texas Rangers have yet to return to the postseason. Their 2025 campaign resulted in an even 81-81 record, finishing six games back of a playoff berth. The team sat two games out of a playoff spot with 13 games remaining in the season following an early-September win streak but collapsed down the stretch. The reason was clear: they just could not hit the ball. As a team, the Rangers possessed the fifth worst on base plus slugging percentage and scored the ninth least runs in the Major Leagues. This agonizing display of offense stood in contrast to their pitching, which, as a team, was the best in the entire majors based off of earned run average. Now, with a new season starting soon, the whole team is facing the pressure to prove that 2023 was not a fluke, and that seal is about to burst.

Departures

The offseason saw considerable turnover for the Rangers roster. Most notably, 2023 World Series champions Marcus Semien, Jonah Heim and Adolis Garcia are no longer on the roster. While it is certainly sad these three players have left, it was the right decision for the team. All three players were poor with their bat, each with an OPS well under the league average. And while Garcia and Semien were both excellent in the field in 2025, the value of a position player is rooted in what they do with a bat.

RAINIER PEDERSON | RETROGRADE STAFF

Other notable departures included starting pitchers Patrick Corbin, who led the team in starts, Merill Kelly, who they acquired at the trade deadline, and Tyler Mahle, who had an amazing 2.18 ERA, although in only 16 starts. The team also saw relievers Phil Maton and Danny Coulombe, both acquired at the trade deadline, leave the team in free agency.

Change was not limited to the roster as Bruce Bochy, who managed the team during their World Series run, mutually agreed with the organization to step down as manager. His replacement Skip Schumaker looks like a strong successor, having won the National League's award for Manager of the Year in 2023.

Pitching

Without a doubt, the Rangers strongest group remains their starting pitchers, Jacob deGrom and Nathan Eovaldi, despite the previously mentioned departures. In his first fully healthy season as a Ranger, deGrom put together a strong campaign, posting an ERA of 2.97 in 30 starts. Eovaldi was even better, posting an absolutely insane 1.77 ERA in 22 starts, although injuries prevented him from competing for the American League Cy Young award.

Their returning support includes Jack Leiter, who finally found consistency in 2025 after being drafted second overall in the 2021 MLB draft, posting a 3.86 ERA in 29 starts, and Jacob Latz, who impressed in eight starts in the second half of the year while also being an asset out of the bullpen, posting a 2.84 ERA across 33 appearances. The team also bolstered their starting pitching by trading for the Washington National's MacKenize Gore, who has a career 4.19 ERA.

The relief pitching, on the other hand, is much more questionable. The unit posted the sixth worst save percentage in the majors, and no significant moves were made to upgrade it. The bullpen will be headlined by Robert Garcia, Chris Martin and Cole Winn.

Offense

The Rangers offense was horrendous in 2025. To fix their dire situation, president of baseball operations Chris Young added…not much. The team acquired outfielder Brandon Nimmo in a trade that sent Semien to the New York Mets. Nimmo had a .760 OPS last season, a notable improvement over Semien at the leadoff spot. The team also added Danny Jansen, who posted a .721 OPS last season, to replace Heim as catcher, splitting the role with Kyle Higashioka.

The two best returning hitters are clearly shortstop Corey Seager and outfielder Wyatt Langford. The question with Seager has never been whether or not he can hit the ball, but whether or not he can stay healthy. Seager posted a .860 OPS in 2025, the highest on the team, but played in only 102 games. Langford built on his solid rookie year by posting a .775 OPS in 2025. As the most physically talented player on the team, the Rangers will be looking for Langford to take another step in his development. A large part of the Rangers season will be determined by whether these two are playing at their best.

Seager and Langford are solid, but they are surrounded by more questionable prospects. Designated hitter Joc Pederson and infielder Jake Burger had underwhelming first years in Texas. Last season, Pederson was one of the worst hitters in the entirety of the majors, posting a measly .614 OPS. As a career .798 OPS hitter, there is hope that this was simply a case of having a bad, outlier season. Meanwhile, third baseman Josh Jung will be looking to stay healthy and, if he's lucky, find his 2023 form again.

His OPS has decreased in each of his last two seasons, posting a .684 OPS in 2025. Outfielder Evan Carter will also have to overcome injury concerns. Two seasons after he became a postseason hero as a rookie in 2023, Carter has only played in 108 games. Carter has shown he can be productive – when he's consistently on the field.

Rounding out the position players is super-utility man Josh Smith, who has provided consistency at the plate the last two seasons while being able to play every position in the field. Finally, infielder Cameron Cauley and outfielder Alejandro Osuna look to provide depth behind the regulars.

Season projection

One question remains: can the Texas Rangers make the playoffs? It will be determined by their hitting. They will continue to have great pitching, but none of that matters if they can't score. If the offense can be a league average unit, the team should have a great shot at making the postseason. Beyond there, it's anyone's game. It'll be hard to find another team in the American League with as good of a starting rotation, and they have hitters like Seager and Carter who elevate their game on the brightest stages. Only time will tell how the season plays out, but for fans of the Texas Rangers, it will be worth a watch.